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SUBJECT: GHANA ELECTIONS: POLITICAL PUNDIT PREDICTS NDC WIN

Classified By: POLCHIEF GARY PERGL FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Political commentator Kwesi Pratt (Protect) predicts an NDC win in a runoff election. He says that NPP candidate Akufo-Addo has Libyan backing, lacks party support in funding his campaign, is less corrupt than others in the Kufuor government, and is innocent of charges that he has a cocaine habit. On the NDC side, Pratt contends that Atta-Mills is among the cleanest politicians in Ghana, and has no obligations to Jerry Rawlings. In the event of an NDC election victory, Pratt says, the shadow that Rawlings casts over Ghanaian politics will be erased once and for all, but if the NPP wins, Rawlings could once again become a force to be reckoned with. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Poloff met on November 21 with Kwesi Pratt, Jr. (Protect), editor and publisher of the Weekly Insight and frequent commentator on FM radio stations, to get his take on upcoming elections. Pratt, who is a well-known political gadfly with ties to the Convention People's Party (CPP), said he is practically alone in predicting a National Democratic Congress (NDC) win, but also expected that it would require a run-off election. He said that much of the money flowing into the campaign of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) candidate Nana Akufo-Addo did not come from the party, but from outside sources, including the Libyans. When Poloff pointed out that the rumor mill had consistently put the Libyans in the NDC camp, Pratt said that Akufo-Addo's funding did not come from Qaddafi, but from the Libyan foreign minister, with whom Akufo-Addo had established a close relationship during his days as Ghana's foreign minister. He added that President Kufuor controlled most of the NPP party money that would normally flow into Akufo-Addo's campaign, and that "he hangs on to a lot of it."

¶3. (C) Pratt said that he has a long-standing personal relationship with both Akufo-Addo and John Atta-Mills that goes back at least two decades. He felt that Akufo-Addo had been unfairly tarnished by the assumption of corruption because of the high-level positions he has held within the Kufuor administration, but that he was in fact much cleaner than most of those around him. Pratt has been a virulent critic of corruption in the Kufuor government, which he labeled as "astronomical" and "an affront to all Ghanaians." The amounts of money being pocketed by public officials had grown exponentially, he said, because of the discovery of oil and the ever-increasing narcotics trade, but he posited that Akufo-Addo, in his role as Foreign Minister in the second Kufuor administration, did not share in the spoils. When questioned about persistent rumors of Akufo-Addo's own cocaine habit, Pratt admitted that he had personal knowledge of the candidate's drug use, but that it was not cocaine. "Nana used to smoke a lot of marijuana," Pratt said, "and I'm telling you, a lot. Even in the morning, there used to be a cloud around him and you could see that he was high. But I never saw him do cocaine, and I think that is just an assumption people made."

13. (C) On the subject of the NDC, Pratt said that Atta-Mills was one of the most incorruptible politicians in Ghana. It is just not in his character to take bribes, and in fact that was why former president Jerry Rawlings chose him as his running mate in 1996. About a year before that election, Pratt said, Rawlings had paid a visit on Atta-Mills, who at the time was the director of Ghana's Internal Revenue Service, to check on income figures he had been given by his finance minister, Kwesi Botchwey. When those tallies didn't add up, Rawlings lost faith in Botchwey (who resigned shortly afterwards, following 12 years in that position) and somewhat like Diogenes searching for an honest man, Rawlings chose the political neophyte Atta-Mills as his vice-presidential candidate. (NOTE: An interesting historical aside: Rawlings and his first-term vice president, Kow Arkaah, never got along well, but Arkaah's fate was sealed when Rawlings suddenly attacked him, punching and kicking him, at a cabinet meeting on December 28, 1995. Even after the beating, Arkaah stubbornly remained in his position, and one year later, while he was still sitting as vice president, John Kufuor, the opposition NPP flagbearer, chose him as his vice presidential candidate, giving Arkaah the strange distinction of running against his own government while still in office for the same position he already held. END NOTE)

14. (C) To prove his point about Atta-Mills' character, Pratt said that Rawlings had tried to extract a promise that Atta-Mills would allow him to name four key cabinet positions -- Foreign Affairs, Interior, Defense, and Finance -- in exchange for Rawlings and his wife actively campaigning on Atta-Mills' behalf. According to Pratt, Atta-Mills refused, and when Pratt asked him why, saying that he could have said

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yes and then reneged on the agreement after being elected, Atta-Mills reportedly said that he couldn't do that, because he is not a man who can go back on his word. In the end, both of the Rawlings have been campaigning vigorously for Atta-Mills because, Pratt said, Nana Agyemang Rawlings is convinced she will go to prison if the NPP is victorious.

15. (C) Repeating what the Embassy has been hearing from other sources, Pratt said that Rawlings has no real influence over Atta-Mills. The two men, whose personalities are diametrically opposed, have little in common, but have arranged a political marriage of convenience that will be annulled as soon as Atta-Mills is inaugurated. If the NDC wins, Pratt is convinced, Rawlings will no longer have a political voice that resonates with the people, and the victory "will put an end to the Rawlings factor forever." In the case of an NPP win, however, Pratt fears that Rawlings could gain a new lease on life in national politics, re-emerging as a redemptive figure hailed by an army of disillusioned and disenfranchised youth. They will lose faith in the political system as represented by moderates such as Atta-Mills, and more readily succumb to the spell of Rawlings-style demagoguery.

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